

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESHB 1279

As Passed House:
January 27, 2014

Title: An act relating to motor voter preregistration for sixteen and seventeen year olds.

Brief Description: Allowing motor voter preregistration for sixteen and seventeen year olds.

Sponsors: House Committee on Government Operations & Elections (originally sponsored by Representatives Bergquist, Riccelli, S. Hunt, Sawyer, Farrell, Stonier, Reykdal, Fitzgibbon, Lytton, Liias, Maxwell, Orwall, Jinkins, Upthegrove, Pedersen, Ryu, Carlyle, Roberts, Tharinger, Hudgins, Fey, Morrell, Santos, Pollet, Hansen and Ormsby).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Government Operations & Elections: 2/6/13, 2/12/13 [DP], 1/14/14, 1/21/14 [DPS].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/7/13, 55-42.

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 1/27/14, 54-42.

Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill

- Allows 16- and 17-year-olds to pre-register to vote when applying for a driver's license or identicaid.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ELECTIONS

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 6 members: Representatives S. Hunt, Chair; Bergquist, Vice Chair; Carlyle, Orwall, Robinson and Van De Wege.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Taylor, Ranking Minority Member; Young, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Christian, Kretz and Manweller.

Staff: Marsha Reilly (786-7135).

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Background:

Eligibility for voter registration requires that a person be a United States citizen and at least 18 years old on or before the next election. The Department of Licensing (DOL) is required to provide voter registration services to persons applying for or renewing a driver's license or identicard.

Currently, eight states and the District of Columbia authorize individuals younger than 18 years old to pre-register to vote. Those eight states are Delaware, Hawaii, Florida, Maryland, North Carolina, Rhode Island, California, and Oregon.

Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill:

The DOL may pre-register a person to vote who is at least 16 years of age at the time he or she applies for a driver's license or identicard. The information contained in the voter preregistration application is exempt from public inspection and copying.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect on January 1, 2015.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This bill will get kids engaged in civics. Studies show that those who get engaged in voting early, continue to vote their entire lives. The bill makes it easy for kids to register to vote. The DOL may register 16- and 17-year-olds if they wish to register to vote at the time they get a driver's license or identicard.

Students value the ability to be civically engaged and this bill will fill a gap in voter registrations. Seventy percent of registrations come from the DOL. If they are not asked to register at age 16, the next opportunity is when they turn 21 years old. This will modernize our system for voter registration. Voting is a habit, and the earlier people are registered, the more likely they will continue.

This policy has been criticized in the past because students tend to move more. Updating an address is easier than filling out a voter registration.

It is clear in law that county auditors' responsibility is to support voter registration and participation. Seventy percent of registrations come through the DOL. It would be easy to pre-register and maintain the system.

Washington Bus supports the bill. People between the ages of 18 and 24 are registered to vote, 24 percent below the average due to access to registration. Studies have found that pre-registering 16- and 17-year-olds has increased overall registration, and those who pre-register voted at a higher percentage.

The League of Women Voters (League) supports the bill. The League was founded on the principal of access to voting. Registration methods should be active and convenient. Research shows that people who become involved at an early age remain active. Voter education should begin early.

(Opposed) We recognize the motor voter program is very effective in registering persons to vote. The Office of the Secretary of State supports voter registration. People vote depending on what is on the ballot, which is unfortunate. While there is no fiscal impact, there are some logistical challenges. Managing the preregistrations will be a manual process. Other registration processes are available, such as registering to vote using a phone.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Bergquist, prime sponsor; Mathew Bobbink and Chanel Rhymes, Washington Student Association; Mary Hall, Thurston County Auditor; Alex Miller, The Washington Bus; and Kathy Sakahara, League of Women Voters.

(Opposed) Katie Blinn, Office of the Secretary of State.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.